

COVID-19 resources for psychologists, health-care workers and the public. [Visit Resources Page »](#)



**AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION**

MEMBERSTOPICSPUBLICATIONS & DATABASESPSYCHOLOGY HELP CENTERNEWS & EVENTSSCIENCEEDUCATIONCAREERSABOUT APA

## Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct

Ethics (<https://www.apa.org/search?query=ethics>)



“ (javascript:toggleCitation());

f (#)

(javascript: openSocialShare("https://twitter.com/share?url=https%3a%2f%2fwww.apa.org%2fethics%2fcode&via=APA&text=Ethical+principles+of+ps

in (javascript: openSocialShare("https://www.linkedin.com/shareArticle?

mini=true&url=https%3a%2f%2fwww.apa.org%2fethics%2fcode&title=Ethical+principles+of+psychologists+and+code+of+conduct&summary=The+American+Psychological+Association%2527s+Ethical+Principles+of+Psychologists+and+Code+of+Conduct+provides+guidance+for+psycholo

✉ (javascript:openEmail());

🖨 (javascript:printThis());

### Including 2010 and 2016 Amendments

Effective date June 1, 2003 with amendments effective June 1, 2010 and January 1, 2017. Copyright © 2017 American Psychological Association. All rights reserved.

▶ **Introduction and Applicability**

▶ **Preamble**

▶ **General Principles**

▶ **Section 1: Resolving Ethical Issues**



---

▶ **Section 2: Competence**

---

▶ **Section 3: Human Relations**

---

▶ **Section 4: Privacy and Confidentiality**

---

▶ **Section 5: Advertising and Other Public Statements**

---

▶ **Section 6: Record Keeping and Fees**

---

▶ **Section 7: Education and Training**

---

▶ **Section 8: Research and Publication**

---

▶ **Section 9: Assessment**

---

▼ **Section 10: Therapy**

---

**10.01 Informed Consent to Therapy**

(a) When obtaining informed consent to therapy as required in Standard [3.10, Informed Consent \(?item=6#310\)](#), psychologists inform clients/patients as early as is feasible in the therapeutic relationship about the nature and anticipated course of therapy, fees, involvement of third parties, and limits of confidentiality and provide sufficient opportunity for the client/patient to ask questions and receive answers. (See also Standards [4.02, Discussing the Limits of Confidentiality \(?item=7#402\)](#), and [6.04, Fees and Financial Arrangements \(?item=9#604\)](#).)

(b) When obtaining informed consent for treatment for which generally recognized techniques and procedures have not been established, psychologists inform their clients/patients of the developing nature of the treatment, the potential risks involved, alternative treatments that may be available, and the voluntary nature of their participation. (See also Standards [2.01e, Boundaries of Competence \(?item=5#201e\)](#), and [3.10, Informed Consent \(?item=6#310\)](#).)

(c) When the therapist is a trainee and the legal responsibility for the treatment provided resides with the supervisor, the client/patient, as part of the informed consent procedure, is informed that the therapist is in training and is being supervised and is given the name of the supervisor.

**10.02 Therapy Involving Couples or Families**

(a) When psychologists agree to provide services to several persons who have a relationship (such as spouses, significant others, or parents and children), they take reasonable steps to clarify at the outset (1) which of the individuals are clients/patients and (2) the

relationship the psychologist will have with each person. This clarification includes the psychologist's role and the probable uses of the services provided or the information obtained. (See also Standard [4.02, Discussing the Limits of Confidentiality \(?item=7#402\).](#))

(b) If it becomes apparent that psychologists may be called on to perform potentially conflicting roles (such as family therapist and then witness for one party in divorce proceedings), psychologists take reasonable steps to clarify and modify, or withdraw from, roles appropriately. (See also Standard [3.05c, Multiple Relationships \(?item=6#305c\).](#))

### **10.03 Group Therapy**

When psychologists provide services to several persons in a group setting, they describe at the outset the roles and responsibilities of all parties and the limits of confidentiality.

### **10.04 Providing Therapy to Those Served by Others**

In deciding whether to offer or provide services to those already receiving mental health services elsewhere, psychologists carefully consider the treatment issues and the potential client's/patient's welfare. Psychologists discuss these issues with the client/patient or another legally authorized person on behalf of the client/patient in order to minimize the risk of confusion and conflict, consult with the other service providers when appropriate, and proceed with caution and sensitivity to the therapeutic issues.

### **10.05 Sexual Intimacies with Current Therapy Clients/Patients**

Psychologists do not engage in sexual intimacies with current therapy clients/patients.

### **10.06 Sexual Intimacies with Relatives or Significant Others of Current Therapy Clients/Patients**

Psychologists do not engage in sexual intimacies with individuals they know to be close relatives, guardians, or significant others of current clients/patients. Psychologists do not terminate therapy to circumvent this standard.

### **10.07 Therapy with Former Sexual Partners**

Psychologists do not accept as therapy clients/patients persons with whom they have engaged in sexual intimacies.

### **10.08 Sexual Intimacies with Former Therapy Clients/Patients**

(a) Psychologists do not engage in sexual intimacies with former clients/patients for at least two years after cessation or termination of therapy.

(b) Psychologists do not engage in sexual intimacies with former clients/patients even after a two-year interval except in the most unusual circumstances. Psychologists who engage in such activity after the two years following cessation or termination of therapy and of having no sexual contact with the former client/patient bear the burden of demonstrating that there has been no exploitation, in light of all relevant factors, including (1) the amount of time that has passed since therapy terminated; (2) the nature, duration, and intensity of the therapy; (3) the circumstances of termination; (4) the client's/patient's personal history; (5) the client's/patient's current mental status; (6) the likelihood of adverse impact on the client/patient; and (7) any statements or actions made by the therapist during the course of

therapy suggesting or inviting the possibility of a posttermination sexual or romantic relationship with the client/patient. (See also Standard [3.05, Multiple Relationships](#).(?item=6#305).)

#### 10.09 Interruption of Therapy

When entering into employment or contractual relationships, psychologists make reasonable efforts to provide for orderly and appropriate resolution of responsibility for client/patient care in the event that the employment or contractual relationship ends, with paramount consideration given to the welfare of the client/patient. (See also Standard [3.12, Interruption of Psychological Services](#).(?item=6#312).)

#### 10.10 Terminating Therapy

(a) Psychologists terminate therapy when it becomes reasonably clear that the client/patient no longer needs the service, is not likely to benefit, or is being harmed by continued service.

(b) Psychologists may terminate therapy when threatened or otherwise endangered by the client/patient or another person with whom the client/patient has a relationship.

(c) Except where precluded by the actions of clients/patients or third-party payors, prior to termination psychologists provide pretermination counseling and suggest alternative service providers as appropriate.

---

► **History and Effective Date**

---

► **Amendments to the 2002 “Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct” in 2010 and 2016**

---

Date created: March 2017



(javascript:toggleCitation());



(#)



(javascript: openSocialShare('https://twitter.com/share?'

url=https%3a%2f%2fwww.apa.org%2fethics%2fcode&via=APA&text=Ethical+principles+of+psychologists+and+code+of+conduct'))



(javascript: openSocialShare('https://www.apa.org/ethics/code-of-conduct?mini=true&url=https%3a%2f%2fwww.apa.org/ethics/code-of-conduct'))

#### Additional Resources

2018 APA Ethics Committee Rules and Procedures [↗](#) (PDF, 197KB)

---

Revision of Ethics Code Standard 3.04 (Avoiding Harm)

---

APA Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct (2017) [↗](#) (PDF, 272KB)

---

2016 APA Ethics Committee Rules and Procedures

Revision of Ethical Standard 3.04 of the  
"Ethical Principles of Psychologists and  
Code of Conduct" (2002, as Amended  
2010) [PDF](#) (PDF, 26KB)

2010 Amendments to the 2002 "Ethical  
Principles of Psychologists and Code of  
Conduct" (PDF, 39KB)

Compare the 1992 and 2002 Ethics  
Codes

CONTACT THE APA  
ETHICS OFFICE

CONTACT APA ETHICS OFFICE

Advancing psychology to benefit society and improve lives



#### PSYCHOLOGISTS

Standards & Guidelines  
PscCareers  
Divisions of APA  
Ethics  
Early Career Psychologists  
Continuing Education  
Renew Membership

#### STUDENTS

Careers in Psychology  
Accredited Psychology Programs  
More for Students

#### ABOUT PSYCHOLOGY

Science of Psychology  
Psychology Topics

#### PUBLICATIONS & DATABASES

APA Style  
Journals  
Books  
Magination Press  
Videos  
APA PsycInfo  
APA PsycArticles  
More Publications & Databases

#### ABOUT APA

Governance  
Directorates and Programs  
Press Room  
Advertise with Us  
Corporate Supporters  
Work at APA  
Contact Us

#### MORE APA WEBSITES

ACT Raising Safe Kids Program

APA PsycNet®

#### GET INVOLVED

American Psychological Foundation

APA Annual Convention

APA Services, Inc.

APA Merch Store

APA Style

Online Psychology Laboratory

Psychology: Science in Action

Advocate

Participate

Donate

Join APA

---

Privacy Statement

Terms of Use

Accessibility

Website Feedback

Sitemap

FOLLOW APA

more

---

© 2021 American Psychological Association  
750 First St. NE, Washington, DC 20002-4242 | Contact Support  
Telephone: (800) 374-2721; (202) 336-5500 | TDD/TTY: (202) 336-6123

19-2069, viewed 2/16/2021

